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To: County and District Superintendents
Coordinators of School Accountability Report Cards (SARCs)
Charter School Principals

From: William L. Padia, Director
Policy and Evaluation Division

Subject: Preparation and Dissemination of SARCs During the 2001-2002 School Year

Ref: PED-SARC 01-01

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide school districts and other interested parties with information about some significant changes in the requirements affecting the content and dissemination of SARCs that are to be prepared during the 2001-2002 school year. These changes result primarily from the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 1632 in August 2000 and from subsequent action by the State Board of Education (SBE), the California Department of Education (CDE) and the SARC Advisory Committee to implement the terms of that legislation. In addition to specifying new requirements, SB1632 provided limited resources to enable the CDE to enhance the level of service and support that it provides to local educational agencies (LEAs) in the preparation of SARCs.

Major Provisions of SB1632

Full implementation of SB1632 will not be completed until July 2002; however, many of the changes will be in effect for the current school year. Current requirements, alternatives for preparation of reports, as well as new resources that are available to LEAs for the 2001-2002 reporting period, are identified in greater detail in the narrative that follows; the primary elements of the legislation include:

- Establishment of an advisory committee to the SBE
- Specification of elements that are required by law to be included in SARCs
- Adoption by the SBE of standard definitions
- Development by the CDE of a template to facilitate comparability in reporting of SARC data and to ease the cost and burden of preparation of reports by LEAs
- Guidelines for dissemination of SARCs by LEAs
- Monitoring the compliance of LEAs by the CDE with legal requirements governing SARCs

SARC Advisory Committee

SB1632 provides for the creation of a SARC Advisory Committee, comprised of thirteen members nominated by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and approved by the SBE. The SBE approved the membership of the SARC Advisory Committee in January 2001. The committee completed the first phase of its work in June 2001 and presented a set of recommendations to the SBE in July. Subsequently, the SBE approved a set of standard definitions to be used by schools when preparing their reports. Some data elements have not yet been defined; these will be completed by July 2002, as required by SB1632. In addition, the committee worked with the CDE to develop a template that meets all of the legal requirements for reporting data on the SARCs. In July of 2001, the committee recommended and the SBE approved the template for release by the CDE.

Content Requirements and the Use of Standard Definitions

All LEAs are required to prepare a SARC for dissemination to parents and other interested members of the community. SB1632 specifies a set of data elements that must be included in all SARCs; these items encompass most but not all items that must be reported; a few additional items are required from other legislation. In addition to incorporating all of the elements that are required by law, SB1632 requires LEAs to adhere to SBE-approved definitions when preparing their SARCs. If the SBE has not yet approved a definition for a required item, the LEA must still report data for that item; however, the LEA may choose to use the definition recommended by the SBE, or it may use a reasonable alternative.

A listing of all of the items required by law for inclusion in the SARC, including definitions for each item that are either required or recommended by the SBE, is contained in a document titled "School Accountability Report Card; Data Element Definitions." This document may be found on the CDE's SARC Web page at the following address:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/oep/sarc/sy0001/elements.htm>

CDE-Developed SARC Template

With guidance from the SARC Advisory Committee, the CDE has developed a template for reporting 2000-2001 SARCs (which are to be disseminated during the 2001-2002 school year). Utilization of the template by schools throughout the state facilitates one of the key objectives of SB1632 to increase comparability in how the data is reported; however, LEAs are not required by law to use the template, if they prefer a suitable alternative. The choice of report format and the sequencing of specific data within the SARC is a local decision as long as it includes all of the data that is required by law.

The CDE will make available an electronic version of the SARC template to every LEA in California. These templates will include much of the required data that pertains to their school(s). LEA personnel that choose to use the templates provided by the CDE need only complete those sections that require local narrative or data. At local discretion, additional

information beyond that which is required by law may also be added to the template. A blank template is currently available for viewing and can be downloaded at the following web address:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/oep/sarc/sy0001/template.htm>.

Once the templates with data are available, LEAs may download the CDE templates, modify them as appropriate and post them on the local web sites. Templates will be in HTML format.

In most cases, if a template is downloaded and saved to a workstation as a web document, it can then be opened in Word or another word processing software.

Each LEA will have control and responsibility for security of their own data. LEAs may want to modify certain portions of the templates provided by the CDE, especially those portions that do not apply to the school because they include fields without data. For example, significant amounts of data are reported by grade level. The template is designed to report any and all combinations of grades from K-12. The CDE will fill up the tables contained in the template with all of the data that is available but will not be deleting the empty rows of cells for which there is no data to report (such as elementary grade level data in the high school SARCs and vice versa). In instances such as this, the LEA may prefer to delete these empty data cells, which is a relatively simple task.

A centralized list of local websites for SARCs is another requirement of SB1632. The CDE will be requesting these local web addresses in a subsequent communication to districts in order to establish a central source for the public to access any SARC in California.

Requirements Regarding the Dissemination of SARCs

SB1632 states “Local educational agencies shall make these SARCs available through the Internet or through paper copies.” It also states that “It is the intent of the Legislature that schools make a concerted effort to notify parents of the purpose of the school accountability report cards, as described in this section, and ensure that all parents receive a copy of the report card; to ensure that the report cards are easy to read and understandable by parents.” Furthermore, LEAs with access to the Internet are required to make SARCs available through that medium and to provide the CDE with the appropriate Internet address so that links can be established from the CDE website to all local SARCs.

CDE interprets these sections, when taken together, to require the notification of all parents of the availability of a full report, and instruction regarding how this information could be obtained both through the Internet and on paper (by request). Dissemination of an abbreviated version of the SARC, including the aforementioned notification would suffice, accompanied by Internet access to all of the required data as long as copies of the full report are available and are provided upon request.

Timelines for Dissemination of SARCs

LEAs must update and disseminate SARCs annually in order to provide current information to parents and other members of the public. The CDE interprets “annually” to mean “once in each

school year.” A common misperception among many school district personnel is that there is a November deadline for dissemination of SARC. There is no specific calendar date by which all SARCs must be completed however; it is clearly advantageous to the public to receive information as early as possible in the year. The more current the data is, the more useful it generally will be.

The CDE plans to complete the preparation of templates for use by LEAs as soon possible once new Academic Performance Index data becomes available sometime in October. It is anticipated that individual SARC templates, including data from the CDE, will be available for access by LEAs in early November. At that time, LEAs will be also given instructions regarding how to access these partially completed templates for downloading, if they choose to do so. LEAs that download the templates will still have to incorporate additional local data, as necessary or appropriate, specific to local circumstances. Finally, after LEAs have completed the preparation of their SARCs, either a copy of each SARC or an equivalent representation of the data should be posted on the local website.

Charter Schools

It is the opinion of the CDE that Proposition 98 requires charter schools to prepare SARCs. The CDE is currently reviewing whether charter schools must comply with the requirements of SB1632.

CDE Compliance Monitoring and Technical Assistance

Procedures for monitoring compliance by LEAs with the requirements for preparation and dissemination of SARCs will be developed by July of 2002. LEAs are responsible for adhering to any legal requirements related to SARCs, regardless of external monitoring procedures. Questions or concerns regarding specific requirements of the law or its implementation may be directed to CDE staff in the Policy and Evaluation Division. Please call Bruce Gordon at (916) 654-6064 or Chris Hartnett at (916), 657-3702. Questions to the CDE regarding the SARC may also be addressed by e-mail to the following address:

sarc@cde.ca.gov

For additional information regarding school accountability report cards, please visit the CDE's main SARC web page at the following web address:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/oep/sarc>